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ABSTRACT

This paper describes an instructional improvement project which produced a series of eight 30-minute videocassettes and an observation guide focusing on the child rearing strategies of parents to provide undergraduate students in developmental psychology with greater understanding and empathy for the parenting role. Specific child development issues are highlighted in each of the tapes using an interview format, including: (1) expectant parent family; (2) adopted child family; (3) traditional family; (4) large family; (5) effects of divorce on children; (6) guiding adolescent growth; (7) the gifted child; and (8) the handicapped child. Development of the project, i.e., background, rationale, design and implementation, is discussed. Anticipated and achieved outcomes of the project are presented as well as the evaluation techniques and the evaluation results. A table showing evaluation results is included. (JAC)

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Use of Videocassette Parent Interviews in Teaching Developmental Psychology

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Introduction and Overview

Summary description of project

In this instructional improvement project, eight videocassette programs were produced, which focused on the child rearing strategies of parents. Each videocassette was approximately 25 to 30 minutes in length and was produced by the Instructional Resources Center of SUNY-Fredonia, either in the participating parents' homes or in the College's television studio.

The eight programs each deal with a different child or adolescent developmental concern or a particular family structural component characteristic. The goal in selecting the eight family situations was to have sufficient diversity so that the undergraduate and graduate viewing audience would have exposure to a wide range of parenting perspectives. It was hoped that by viewing many of the series of eight programs that students preparing for careers where interaction with parents is an expressed or implicit requirement, would gain a greater awareness of the diversity of parent perspectives on child rearing.

Each videocassette program in the series includes a discussion of some general child development themes, such as styles of parental discipline, sex role development, and parental views on their children's education. The degree of depth on these general themes varied, depending upon the degree

of parental interest and the relevance of a theme to the particular family situation. Besides the general developmental themes, the interviewers concentrated on the special interests of each group of parent participants. Thus, for example, in the program on the effects of divorce on children the bulk of the interview centers on such issues as child custody arrangements, the explanation of the divorce to the children, and short- and long-term reactions of children to the divorce.

Accompanying the eight videocassettes is an observation guide, produced by the project directors, to assist students in summarizing and interpreting the content of each program. The observation guide includes an approximate one to two page discussion on the underlying child development issues relevant to each program, followed by a series of six to eight discussion questions based upon the specific content of the particular program. The use of the observation guides allows students to become more actively involved in the intended learning process.

An important element of the project is evaluation. The videocassette programs are yielding student evaluative data for each course in which they are employed. As the evaluative data accumulates over several semesters, modifications in the use of the programs will be made. Also, the publication of articles and the presentation of papers related to the project will be accomplished as soon as sufficient evaluative data become available.

Project background and rationale

Both project authors have had extensive experience in teaching courses in the area of child and adolescent development. As a result of their teaching experience, both were acutely aware of the relative lack of understanding which most undergraduate students possessed about the parenting role. Perhaps as a result of lingering adolescent egocentrism, many students naively assumed that all parents behaved, or should behave, as their own parents did and do. As a result, the project authors believed that students required greater exposure to a variety of parents. While ideally it would have been valuable for students to go out into the community and interview parents, logistically, this would have been a prohibitive task. It was then decided that the production of videocassette interviews would be an effective alternative way, of educating large numbers of students about parents. Videocassette programs would also provide the greatest degree of instructional flexibility, as they could be utilized in a variety of courses relating to child development. Another feature of the videocassette programs was the fact that they could provide a standardized stimulus for the analysis of varying parenting strategies.

Having decided to proceed with the production of the videocassette programs, the project authors quickly realized that to accomplish their goals and to produce programs of high technical quality, they would have to obtain financial support

from sources external to their academic department and local campus. Thus, application for an Improvement of Undergraduate Instruction grant from the State University of New York was a necessity.

Procedure

Project design

The overall objective of the project was to improve the undergraduate instruction of teacher education students as well as students in the helping professions who plan to work with children and adolescents. The project sought to improve undergraduates' knowledge of and understanding of parents and parents' viewpoints on child rearing and child development. The following specific objectives were sought in the project:

1) Students will become more familiar with the overall concerns of parents in raising children and to parental expectations of children's school learning experiences.
2) Students will become more sensitive to differences in parental viewpoints on child development which are related to variations in parental socio-economic backgrounds.
3) Students will become more cognizant of the important parental and home influences on children, both advantageous and detrimental, which affect learning and development.

4) Students will be able to observe how parents of children with "special" developmental characteristics (e. g., gifted, handicapped) feel about their children and the professionals who interact with their children.

5) Students after viewing the videocassettes, will be more likely to actively seek parental assistance and advice when they later assume professional positions which involve working with children.

Project activities

The project authors upon notification of the grant award but prior to program production, developed detailed interview protocols for all of the selected parent participants. Each protocol was individually tailored to the unique family structure characteristics and to the unique developmental characteristics of the children within each family. While the interview protocols insured a degree of structure for the parent interview sessions, they did not preclude the use of spontaneous questions by the interviewers during the program production sessions.

Four of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the parent participants. These included the following program titles: The Large Family, The Effects of Divorce on Children, Guiding Adolescent Growth, and the Gifted Child. Production of the in-home programs proved to be difficult and time consuming. Problems with lighting, camera position, and sound

were more numerous than they were for in-studio productions. While the in-home productions probably contributed to greater program realism, the project authors concluded in retrospect, that they were not worth their effort in terms of final program quality. Thus, the last four programs were produced in the campus color television studio. These included the following program titles: The Expectant Parents, The Adopted Child, The Traditional Family, and The Handicapped Child. The project authors were accompanied in their production sessions by a television director, two camera operators, and a sound operator. The television director also played a significant role in the final editing of the eight programs and in the production of the introductory program segments.

Materials developed

A total of eight 25 to 30 minute color videocassette programs along with a 19 page observation guide were produced. The eight videocassette programs are as follows:

1) The Expectant Parents-Interview with a young couple expecting their first child and their plans for child rearing.
2) The Adopted Child-Interview with a couple who recently adopted an infant. They describe the adoption process and the special concerns of adopting parents.
3) The Traditional Family-Interview with a couple with strong lower-middle class ethnic values, which influence their child rearing strategies.

4) The Large Family-Interview with the parents of eight children ranging in age from 9 to 25. They describe the unique difficulties of their parenting task.

5) Effects of Divorce for Children-Interview with a young mother of two daughters reveals the reaction of children to divorce and the effect of a "joint custody" arrangement.

6) Guiding Adolescent Growth-Interview with parents of four adolescents which includes an examination of adolescent sexuality, drug use, discipline, and moral development.

7) The Gifted Child-Interview with parents of a gifted nine year old boy reveals the developmental pattern and societal response to giftedness.

8) The Handicapped Child-Interview with parents of a young child with a chronic lung problem and developmental delay reveals their ordeal with doctors and other professionals during the course of their son's hospitalization and later rehabilitation.

The observation guide which was produced includes a one to two page narrative about the relevance of the child rearing concern featured in each videocassette program along with six to eight study questions per program. The observation guide is a bound publication which includes material on all eight videocassette programs.

Implementation of program

As indicated earlier, the videocassette programs that were produced by the project authors were implemented within one month of their completion. One of the authors (JRS) integrated five of the videocassettes into his summer school course of Developmental Psychology. Students in this class were shown the programs during class time, after which discussion and questions concerning each program ensued. Students were then requested to answer, in writing, the questions appropriate to each program from the observation guide, and to pass their responses in to the course instructor at the next class meeting. Student responses were limited to two typed pages, in order to encourage clarity and brevity in writing. The student responses were evaluated on a scale of 1 to 10, and were returned to students one day after submission.

The other author (GFH) has utilized virtually all of the videocassettes into three undergraduate courses. Four tapes are usually shown in Developmental Psychology: "The Expectant Parent" in conjunction with discussions of prenatal development; "The Traditional Family," or the "Effects of Divorce on Children" in conjunction with discussions of socialization factors. "The Adopted Child" is used in the discussion of the nature/nurture controversy and "Guiding Adolescent Growth" is used to illustrate adolescent development. The tapes relating to gifted

and handicapped children are used in the courses Learning and Behavior Disorders and Developmental Disabilities to illustrate the effects of family factors on the development of exceptional children.

In each case, students complete the questions pertaining to the tape in the study guide. These are graded and returned and are used as a basis for class discussion of the issues raised in the tapes. This pertains to another value of these videocassettes. Since virtually all students see each tape shown, they provide a common core of experience to which reference can be made in lectures and discussions, and to which students can refer when writing essay or exam questions. They are far more successful in this regard than are assigned readings for this purpose.

Results

Anticipated and Achieved Outcomes

Several of the major outcomes of this project have already been presented: students are exposed to a variety of parenting perspective, gain insight into the ways in which parents influence child development, are able to empathize with parental concerns, gain an appreciation of parents as partners in the child's education and have a common basis for class discussion.

In addition, it is hoped that individuals viewing these tapes and utilizing the study guide learn to be careful and intelligent listeners: able to abstract from a conversation important ideas and themes, and able to relate these to knowledge gained elsewhere. The latter point is central, for students frequently fail to grasp the relevance of course content without illustration. Finally, it is hoped that some viewers are led to objectify and analyze their own experience with parents and to recognize both the unique and common aspects of this relationship.

Evaluation Techniques and Results

There are two sources of evaluation of this project. The first source consists of written assignments accompanying the study guide. These are evaluated in terms of their accuracy, adequacy and in the case of inferential or implication/application type questions their relationship to course content. While students are free to speculate on certain questions, answers are expected to integrate information presented in the text or class discussions. While this is largely a subjective source of project evaluation, it is clear that student responses are uniformly good, with the average grade equalling a B+ equivalent.

The second source of project evaluation is a survey distributed at the end of the semester to all course participants (N = 211). Results are summarized in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 here

As can be seen in Table 1, students generally agree that the objectives of the tape series are largely met. Answers to questions 1 and 8 indicate increased empathy with parents. Responses to questions 2, 4 and 5 indicate that students appreciate the illustrative nature of the interviews. The response to question 3 indicates that students better appreciate the information parents can provide to teachers. Answers to questions 6, 7, and 9 suggest a positive value placed on the tapes as a means of instruction and on the study guide as a useful adjunct.

Other considerations in evaluating this project clearly favor its implementation. Once the videocassettes are developed they are easily and simply integrated with course content. Since the tapes are on campus, problems with scheduling and rental costs are eliminated. On the Fredonia campus, playback equipment is readily available or the cassettes are shown over closed circuit television. The nature of the videotape cassette is itself an advantage. These are easily reproduced, inexpensive, easy to store and not generally subject to the same deterioration as film, for example. The cost of implementation and operation of the tapes and of the project generally are virtually nil, and continued implementation is highly likely.

Summary and Conclusions

In the judgment of the authors this has been a most rewarding project. Project products and the outcomes of their implementation have directly and simply accomplished the major objectives established by the authors. There is no doubt that the project resulted in a clear benefit to students and in a general improvement of the instruction in the courses where it has been implemented.

Reflecting on our personal involvement, the production of this series of tapes has been education for us as well. It has broadened our expertise in media production and use, made us aware of the uses and limitations of this media and has suggested other uses for the medium of television in instruction. The use of the videocassettes in class has afforded us an opportunity to share experiences with our students and to update our curricula to accommodate the information presented.

Generally, it has been a most rewarding experience for all involved.

Table 1

Videocassette Observation Evaluation Results

Responses to all questions are on the scale 1 = strongly agree to 5 = strongly disagree.

Question	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. The interviews in this series helped me to better understand the parents' point of view in child development.	1.90	.62
2. The interviews helped me to better understand certain concepts in the course.	2.34	.82
3. As a result of viewing these interviews, I would be more likely to seek information from the parents of children I will teach.	2.00	.83
4. As a result of viewing these interviews I better understood child development.	2.37	.83

5.	As a result of viewing these interviews, I better understood the contribution of parents to child development.	1.78	.63
6.	These interviews should become a permanent part of the course.	1.97	.85
7.	I would have learned as much listening to a lecture on the topic of parental influences on child development as I did by viewing these tapes.	3.42	.98
8.	I have a better appreciation for the difficulties faced by parents as a result of viewing these tapes.	2.11	.80
9.	The study guide was useful in viewing these observations.	1.76	.77